

LEIGHTON BUZZARD
Urban District Council.

Annual
Report

OF THE
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH,

For the Year 1897.

A faint, light-colored watermark of a classical building with four columns and a triangular pediment is visible in the background.

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TO THE
URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL
OF
LEIGHTON BUZZARD.

GENTLEMEN,

I have the honour to present to you my Annual Report for the year 1897. I put the population of the Township at 6800, being a slight increase on the 6754 of previous years, the natural increase would be still greater but it is affected by the great removal of Railway men from this neighbourhood at different times since the last census, now seven years ago; but for that occurrence our population ought to be by this time 7054. The Births in year just concluded were 139 or 20.44 per thousand, calculated on a population of 6800, a considerable falling off from 1896 which was 25. I notice that in 1892 it was as high as 28.

The Deaths in 1897 both in the Township and in Union House (of persons belonging to Leighton) were 88, giving an average of 12.94, a slight increase on previous year, but in 1891, the year of the formation of the Urban Authority, it was as high as 21.

Proceeding to analyse the deaths I find the proportion for Zymotic (which means infectious or preventible Disease) was 0.14, which is very low indeed, so that the Council must be congratulated on the almost entire freedom of their Township from Zymotic Disease. Is that a consequence of the New Water and Sewage Works being brought into practical use? It is indeed, in my opinion, impossible to answer that question in any other manner than the affirmative. The Death Rate from Phthisis (consumption) was 1.9, rather less than 1896, but higher than it ought to be, and would be lower still if the dampness were improved away, the causes of which I dwelt upon at length in my 1896 Report.

Diseases of the Respiratory Organs (excluding Phthisis,) 1.02 which is again an improvement. Deaths under one year old, 57.5, comparing well with 88.7 of previous year, and 129. of 1895.

With regard to notification of Infectious Diseases, this Authority is the only one in the County that refuses adoption of the Act, but I trust that the Council will presently come round to it. Your Council has under consideration certain clauses of the Diseases Prevention Act, which require, most sensibly, that Keepers of Lodging Houses shall notify Infectious Disease occurring on their premises. I gather from this that the Council are gradually recognising notification.

Certainly lodging house keepers are the very ones that ought to be made to notify, as their inmates are of the lowest and dirtiest to be found anywhere, and most likely to bring Infectious Disease into a Town, and from their Migratory nature to take it everywhere else. I hope they will not bring us Small Pox from Middlesbrough where it seems to be a formidable epidemic, and, unprotected as we are by the vaccination not being insisted upon of late years, we might fall a prey to it. Many years ago Small Pox was brought by a tramp into another Bedfordshire Town (Ampthill,) which was decimated by it. Later on in 1891 or beginning of 1892, it was brought into our Town by a tramp, but owing to our having an Isolation Hospital to which we took each case at once, it ran to no more than five cases in all; our Town was thus saved by the Hospital. Our neighbourhood has the Tramps, I may say, rather focussed upon it by a shelter, founded by private benevolence, but a few miles out of the town.

The principle of keeping infectious disease at bay, through the practice of isolation, brings me to the consideration of our Hospital, which has been a "vexed question" for some time. Originally belonging to the 16 parishes governed by the Rural Sanitary Authority, it has, by devolution of circumstances, come to belong to no less than four District Councils—two of which concern the Bucks. parishes; and who have provided themselves with a new Hospital of their own; but as the four Councils jointly own the old Hospital, the question of proprietorship must be settled—the sooner the better—by arbitration, so as to know where we are. The old Hospital, one would think, would remain for the six Beds. parishes, but five of them constituting the Eaton Bray District Council, have decided not to use the Hospital, which thus remains in the hands of, and practically belongs to, the Urban Authority of Leighton. What shall be done with it? Continue with it? Buy land for its necessity, and further improve it to modern requirements, in spite of its grievously bad, because *low-lying* situation, or dispose of the building to the Guardians, who do not seem anxious to purchase; but who have issued an order not to permit the burial of excreta in the workhouse garden after a certain date? Permission however has been obtained to bury the excreta on other land hard by. The site is so low that water will not, or will scarcely run; it is evident that if connections are made with the

new works that a patent sewage lift, costing a matter of £250, would become necessary. Undoubtedly, local authorities ought to be relieved of the necessity of providing Isolation Hospitals at all; the County Council is, far and away, the proper authority to supply the County's need of such necessities, as they could decide as to the different areas required; and as the Bucks. parishes of our Union have provided themselves with a Hospital; the Beds. parishes might share in one placed at Houghton Regis or Tilsworth, or some such place as the County Council, in its wisdom, may see fit to provide.

Our new water has frightened the people by its depositing red oxide of iron on exposure to the air. Its a thousand pities that such a prejudice should be created, as the iron is *not* a poison; it completely deposits, and very soon, on exposure to the air, by giving up the carbonic acid gas, which had held it in solution; and further, the proto-carbonate of iron contained in this water is the most wholesome, the most digestible, and the least constipating of all the forms of which iron consists, but people are frightened at what they do not understand. In consequence of the alarm I brought the matter before the Urban Council a few months back, asking them to order an analysis to be made, which they did, and when Professor Attfield's report appeared in the public press, I found it gave general satisfaction. Except for the iron, the water is singularly pure and soft, and its purity is really guaranteed by the antiseptic property of the much-abused, but very innocent and even beneficial mineral.

Many more houses are connected with the new works than there were at the commencement of the year, and the work is still going on. The High-street houses are the more necessary to get done, as the Chamber of Agriculture require us to pave our market, under threat of closing it if that work is not done.

It was thought desirable to buy the Tolls, and ask for a subscription for that purpose, which appeal has been nobly responded to; but matters have not been settled.

As to public scavenging, that question has been before the Council, but nothing settled as yet. It is very desirable that some plan should be put into operation for effecting that needful reform.

As to pollution of streams and water-courses, this has been done to a most lamentable extent by the old system of drainage, now disappearing; but the new system is on a different principle, avoiding the further defilement of rivers, and when the work has reached its development, doubtless, the Council will fully purify the streams. I had to bring a complaint before the Council, about October last, of

blood finding its way into the stream near Chain Bridge emanating from a slaughter-house yard near Lake Street. The butcher was directed to slaughter his beasts *in* the slaughter-house, and *not* in the yard, thus avoiding the use of the surface drains, which are only intended for storm-water, and not for blood or anything else.—The slaughter-houses in the Town have been periodically visited during the year.

There has been one case of over-crowding in a dwelling, which has been promptly corrected. As to Lodging Houses, notice has been served on the one in Mill Road to do necessary repairs and connections, but this has been only partially attended to. Connections have been made to the Bassett Road and St. Andrew's Street houses; but not, as yet, to the Workhouse Lane House, is not this too crowded a locality for its continuance to be desirable? and further, it badly wants repair; at one time the staircase was so faulty as to be dangerous, but on my reporting to the Council it was promptly repaired. In the four Lodging Houses 4,282 males and 1,142 females were received in the year.

Forty-two nuisances and complaints in the Township have been attended to; six manure and refuse pits emptied; nine ash-bins emptied; five houses disinfected; 2 pigsties (improperly kept) reported upon and the nuisance abated; Boiling of offal, 1; foul privies (20,) reported; disinfectants supplied in 23 instances; schools disinfected, 5; building plans approved, 15. The boiling of offal seems a determined practice in Country places, in fact, they seem almost to think it good for health, whereas the very contrary is the fact, but as a place becomes more emphatically a Town with closely inhabited streets and with modern requirements of health and comfort, such horrors as offal boiling must cease to exist. A case happened in the High Street last April, where the whole neighbourhood were indignant at the nuisance, we had the copper emptied the same evening that we inspected it, and the Council threatened a prosecution if the offence was repeated; I am happy to say that I have heard no more of it.

Tables A and B are appended; and

I have the honour to remain,

Gentlemen,

Yours obedient Servant,

J. A. HEDGES,

March 30th, 1898.

Medical Officer.

